

Learning Curve by jackwabbit

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Family

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-11-12 15:17:58

Updated: 2017-11-12 15:17:58

Packaged: 2019-12-17 04:51:19

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,059

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Vignette. Found Family. Dad Hopper. Spoilers: Stranger Things, Season Two. Summary: Eleven sometimes takes things too literally. But eventually, she gets it right.

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Rated: G

Category: Vignette. Found Family. Dad Hopper.

Time Frame: Any time after Season Two, but most likely before Season Three.

Spoilers: Stranger Things, Season Two.

Summary: Eleven sometimes takes things too literally. But eventually, she gets it right.

Lucas nodded seriously at Eleven.

"Don't worry, I got your back," he said.

Eleven suddenly twisted in her seat.

"What about my back?" she asked, trying to see behind herself.

Lucas rolled his eyes and sighed. As much as the party all loved her, Eleven's continued literal interpretation of so many things sometimes got a little old. Still, it was understandable, and he was about to answer her when Dustin's voice cut into the conversation.

"It's a saying," he said. "It means he won't let anything happen to you."

"Yeah," added Mike. "Like if you're busy with the dragon, he'll take care of any demons that pop up."

Then it was Max's turn. "Or like when Han Solo shot Darth Vader so Luke could blow up the Death Star."

Eleven looked puzzled for a second, then smiled at Max. She'd liked those movies.

"You get it?" asked Will.

"Yes," answered Eleven simply. "And it's important."

"You know it," said Lucas, grinning and wiggling his eyebrows. "So you gonna roll or what?" he asked, nodding toward the board.

Eleven took the dice without another word and shook them with both hands. Then she let them go on the table.

Her roll was a good one, and true to his word, Lucas managed to keep all the little things at bay while she took down the boss. It was her first big win in Dungeons and Dragons, and the party celebrated with whoops and hearty high fives all around.

It was a great session, and everyone was so busy enjoying it that no one noticed that while Eleven joined in just fine, her forehead kept crinkling up when she wasn't distracted, and she cast a few furtive glances at the windows from time to time.

That is, no one except Mike, who waited until everything was put away a while later to say anything.

"You ok, El?"

Eleven nodded. "Yeah. Why?"

Mike shrugged. "I don't know. You seemed a bit distracted earlier."

Now it was El's turn to shrug. "It's nothing."

"You sure?"

Eleven smiled. "I'm fine."

Just then, headlights danced across the wall of the room and Mike sighed.

"Guess that's your ride."

Dustin looked through the curtains and confirmed Mike's statement.

"Yep. It's the chief alright."

Eleven gathered her things and hugged everyone goodbye, then made her way to the door.

Mike walked with her and they shared another hug, then she slipped out the door before Hopper was halfway out of his truck.

When he saw her coming, he paused and gave her a puzzled look.

Usually, he had to practically drag her out of the house when he came to get her. Or at the very least, he had to knock. Her meeting him like this was unprecedented.

"Hey, kid," he said. "What's up?"

He barely had the words out when he was pulled into a crushing hug.

He blinked a few times in surprise, then returned the hug with gusto.

After a moment, he separated himself from her just enough to look her in the eyes.

"Hey," he asked quietly, "you ok? I mean, I'm not complaining, but..."

He trailed off as Eleven nodded, looking down and seeming more like the scared girl he'd found in the woods nearly two years ago than the too cool for hugs teenager she was most of the time these days.

But when she didn't offer anything else and also didn't let go of him, he tipped her chin up with one finger to look into her face again.

"You sure? Last I checked, you were still pissed at me for not letting you stay over."

Eleven narrowed her eyes and finally stepped away from him.

"Even though Max can," she said.

Hopper sighed and ran a hand through his beard.

"Exactly. So..." He made a vague gesture between his body and Eleven's.

He'd expected a shrug. Or an eye roll. Maybe a few choice words, like he'd gotten earlier for insisting she come home at ten. Or for her to just get in the truck without explanation. She was good at that.

What he didn't expect was for her to launch herself at him again.

Or for her to mumble two nonsensical words into his shirt as she hugged him tightly.

His brain tried to translate what he thought he heard for a moment, but he came up empty, so he asked for clarification.

"Han Solo?" he asked.

She nodded against his chest.

Hopper let out a long breath. It was still like this sometimes. She still spoke in metaphors and bizarre, staccato sentences when she was overwhelmed. And sometimes he was still lost.

He ran a hand through her hair as he spoke again.

"What do you mean, El? I'm not dressing up for Halloween, if that's what you're asking."

Eleven snorted and let him go, slowly walking to her side of the truck.

As she climbed in, Hop sighed and did the same, thinking that was the end of it. That he wasn't going to get a conclusion to tonight's episode of the "Eleven Does Something Odd" show.

But as he reached for the keys hanging in the ignition, her hand found his and stopped his motion.

He met her eyes then, and she swallowed once, then spoke slowly.

"Had my back," she said clearly.

Hopper's eyebrows drew together for just a moment, then relaxed as he gave her a sad half smile and a slow nod.

"Yeah," he muttered. "Always."

El nodded back with her own half smile.

"Always."

Then she turned to look out her window and Hopper started the truck.

And *that* was the end of it.

They drove home in silence.

But if Jim Hopper just happened to take some kid dressed like a Jedi trick-or-treating that year while wearing a black vest with a white shirt instead of his usual khaki, well, what of it?